The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 26 APRIL 24th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

An incident in the battle for Narvik may bring us cheer. It is what took place between the Admiralty and the captain of the British flotilla of destroyers. The Admiralty gave orders that the flotilla should attack the German forces, but when they realised the hazardous nature of the operations, they told the captain that he must be the sole judge of whether to attack or not and that the Admiralty would support him unreservedly whatever he did and whatever happened. Decisions on which the most momentous issues hung were unreservedly confided to the discretion of the man who could best form a judgment and he was promised unconditional support. Captain Warburton-Lee signalled back, " Going into action." He lost his ship and his own life but carried out an exploit which will live in the annals of the Navy.

It is through the capacity of men to trust one another, of which this is a signal instance, that society coheres. Against the background of a crime as treacherous and inhuman as any in European history, the story reveals in a flash the quality of right and satisfying human relations. It is a reminder that the present and the future are not separated by a sharp and rigid line but that the better future is already active in germ and potency in the present.

Streaks of nobility illuminating the tragedy of war illustrate the inseparable intertwining of good and evil in human life. The struggle between the demonic and the divine goes on unceasingly at every moment, under all conditions, in every society and in every individual soul. That is why it is entirely unchristian and dangerously misleading to dramatise the present conflict as a crusade or holy war. A sufficient case can be made for resisting the immoral doctrines of Nazism and the tyranny which threatens to engulf the world, without falling into the unchristian error of regarding evil as something that exists only, or chiefly, in our opponents. That is pure self-deception. It blinds us to the existence of faults in ourselves and of radical evils in our own society which must be remedied if it is to survive. It holds us back from confronting the basal reality that the evils from which the world is suffering are spiritual and can be overcome only by spiritual means, even though the necessary first step is to check their aggressive external manifestation. An attitude of self-righteousness and complacency is thus the chief hindrance to that fundamental repentance and penitence out of which alone a genuinely new order can be born.

There are many signs that war fever is in danger of destroying the very things for the preservation of which we profess to be waging war. The splendid virtues of our sea tradition must not be allowed to conceal from us other sinister happenings. In some sections of the press a furious campaign is being conducted for drastic action against aliens and those who for one reason or another are opposed to the war. No community fighting for its existence in what it believes to be a righteous cause can

tolerate assistance given to the enemy or deliberate attempts to thwart its major purpose. But to allow this legitimate demand for protection to degenerate into an unreasoning and hysterical attack on respect for conscience and on the hospitality we have extended to the victims of Nazi cruelty is to obliterate the difference between the doctrines we are fighting and those we espouse, and thereby to render the war meaningless.

We detest Nazism. But it is no less detestable among ourselves than in the Germans. What we claim to be fighting is an evil doctrine, philsophy and behaviour, and we are driven to fight the Germans because they are seeking to impose this devilish system on the world. If that is true, those among ourselves who adopt the doctrines or imitate the behaviour of our opponents are betraying our cause just as much as those who side with the Germans.

The temper in which we entered on the war was marked by magnanimity. Can this quality be maintained through a long war? We are fighting because we see no other means of preserving against external menace a way of life which, however imperfectly we have achieved it, we highly value — freedom of conscience, liberty of discussion, the reign of law and the spirit of toleration and mutual respect. What is gained by defeating the external menace, if these things disappear from our own society and our own souls? They cannot just be picked up again when the war is over, if in blind passion we let them go during the period of the war. There is not any hope of creating a better order after the war unless we are creating it now—or allowing God to create it—in our hearts and minds and our relations with our fellow-men. We must redouble our efforts to bring this vital truth home to the minds of all whom we can influence.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOME

I have a letter from Dr. Lyttelton, the former headmaster of Eton, in which he suggests that much of the controversy about education is due to a general blindness to the immense importance of the earliest years. Unless religion is implanted in the child mind as early and as effectually as the teaching of the knowledge of the world, the teaching in the school, however good, is severely handicapped. "Every day that passes adds to the knowledge of, and interest in, the seen world; the teaching of the unseen world is aloof from all that really interests him, the knowledge of nature, other children and his own moral difficulties. But at the very beginning the Personality, the Presence and the Love of God are left on one side—Why? Because the child is not taught to join with both parents in a daily act of worship, which might quite easily and effectively be done, beginning at a year and a half. That is the way he learns something new about this world every day and what he learns by watching his parents he never forgets. Can any method be more important? How many practise it?"

The crucial importance of the home for religious development is the subject of an excellent little book which is an appeal by a schoolmaster to parents. It is by Conrad Skinner, the chaplain of the Leys School, and is called *A Boy's Right to Religion* (Epworth Press, 1s.).

SPIRITUAL HOSTS OF WICKEDNESS.

Satanic forces seem to-day to be in the saddle. Not only have the impulses of violence, cruelty and lust broken loose in the world, but apart from the forebodings which these awaken, many people have a growing sense of a hostile element in the universe, a power of evil which wages malicious war against their spirits. The words

of St. Paul that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual hosts of wickedness find a responsive chord in their experience. One of our members writes to me that he believes that the real battle is being fought not on earth but in the spiritual realm and that the victory will be won not so much by what we *do*, but by prayer and inward acts of faith. This perception has recalled him from his own neglect of prayer. I am sure that we need to lay this truth to heart. Prayer and sacrament can too easily become a means of escaping from the actual conflicts of life; but they are also the means by which we may engage in those conflicts at a deeper level of our being than that of the conscious rational self which normally thinks and acts. Modern psychology confirms the biblical view of man, not as a self-contained personality, master of his fate, but as the battle-ground of contending forces of good and evil, open on the one hand to possession by demonic powers and on the other to the invasions of redeeming grace.

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN RUMANIA AND SOLDIERS' FAMILIES

The concentration of troops in Rumania since September has been the cause of much distress, especially among the peasants. But from October the Church in many dioceses has taken the lead in relief work. In every agricultural parish there exists a social council presided over by the village priest. It is the tradition that at harvest time the villagers should give gifts in kind for distribution through this council. These gifts are kept as an emergency store for two years and the balance is then sold for cash. From these stores and from the sale of balances help is now being given to many families where the breadwinner is mobilised. There are weekly gifts of corn and maize, arrangements for canteens and for the daily distribution of milk to the children, and occasional gifts of clothes and boots. In January the Rumanian state recognised the value of this work and ordered that the village mayor and schoolmaster in each parish should become a member of the committee concerned with the administration of this special relief; the priest continues to preside at the meetings. In some town parishes special funds have been raised by appealing to the people to give for this purpose money which would otherwise be spent on extravagant eating and drinking on the occasion of family festivals or on flowers at funerals.

PRESIDENT MASARYK

The last issue (March 29) of the *Spirit of Czechoslovakia* (Dr. F. M. Hnik, 114, Park Street, London, W.1) is a memorial number to the late Thomas Masaryk. Two of the contributors refer to him as an example of Plato's ideal of the philosopher-king. He combined outstanding practical ability with deep wisdom and firm devotion to principle. He said himself that he saw in politics only a means; the end for him was a religious and moral one. Sir Richard Livingstone suggests in the article he contributes that the life of Masaryk might well be one of the prescribed books in an examination for persons entering politics, and that candidates might be advised to read his conversations with Karel Capek, entitled *Masaryk on Thought and Life* (George Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d.), since few modern books contain more wisdom about politics and life.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

I should like this week, when the News-Letter completes the first half-year of its existence and half-yearly subscriptions fall due, to thank all our members whose generous co-operation has made the whole effort possible.

The Letter has been carried on from the start by Miss Iredale and myself with

a small team of indefatigable workers. We continue to draw help from our collaborators up and down the country, who are themselves working in a variety of ways at some part of the total task. A small group also meets regularly for an evening each week to talk over the coming issue and future plans. But the success of the Letter has been due mainly to our members who have helped to circulate it among their friends, and who send us week by week fruitful suggestions and helpful criticisms from which we learn much. We hope that the News-Letter is contributing to the growth of a fellowship of people who are coming to share increasingly a common body of ideas and a sense of responsibility for translating them into action.

You would be greatly interested if you could see the contents of our post-bag. It brings us between 150 and 200 letters a day from all parts of the world and from correspondents representing the most varied types of experience. I do my best to answer personally as many of the letters as I can. Every letter is carefully read and digested by the staff of the News-Letter.

Since the Letter was launched on November 1st, no day has passed without subscriptions coming in from fresh sources. The number of those who subscribed for three months, or received the News-Letter for that period as a Christmas gift, and who have been unable to renew their subscriptions has been made good by the addition of fresh subscribers. We had the encouragement last week of celebrating the passing of the 10,000 mark in our membership. This has come about without any publicity on our part. If we had a larger staff, there is no doubt we could do more to bring the Letter to the attention of many who, we believe, would welcome it. We have got to get that larger staff and make that larger effort if we are to justify ourselves.

It will interest you to know that the News-Letter has spread to almost every part of the world. We have members in thirty-eight countries. These include Australia, Belgian Congo, Belgium, British West Indies, Burma, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Federated Malay States, Fiji Islands, Gibraltar, Greece, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Iraq and Iran, Italy, Japan, Java, Latvia, Manchoukuo, New Zealand, Palestine, Portuguese Congo, Russia, Siam, Straits Settlements, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria and the United States. Week by week over 900 copies are despatched overseas.

We are now offering special rates for group subscribers to bona fide groups, and these are growing everywhere. In one town in England five groups are meeting weekly to discuss issues raised by the News-Letter. News reaches us of groups in the Fiji Islands, the Belgian Congo and Jamaica.

We know much better than when we started what we want to do, and we have also clearer ideas of what you want. We are confident that with your help, interest and concern we shall learn how better to achieve the ends we have in view.

Your sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Subscriptions. — The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 10s. ($3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months.

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Non est potestas Super Terram quae Comparetur ei Iob. 41. 24.
LEVIATHAN
Or
THE MATTER, FORME
and POWER of A COMMON-
WEALTH ECCLESIASTICALL
and CIVIL.
By THOMAS HOBBES
of MALMESBURY.
London
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LEVIATHAN OR THE TWOFOLD STATE

By a Correspondent

"In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan and slay the Dragon" (Isaiah 27, 1).

Tyranny is as old as the evil passions of men. The first writer on the science of government, Aristotle, observed that in his day most tyrannies were founded by demagogues. A tyrant, he tells us, is ever influenced by flatterers, sends spies among his subjects, incites his victims to quarrel, conciliates poor or rich, whichever be stronger, and seeks to preserve his power by playing "father to his people." "A tyrant," he says, "seeks to humiliate those he rules, for he knows that mean-spirited men will not conspire against anybody; to create mutual distrust among them, for he cannot be overthrown until men trust one another, so that they refuse to play the informer's part; and to render them in all ways incapable of independent action." The picture has not grown dim with age.

The totalitarianism of our day is a tyranny, but it is something more; it is also a religion; it makes demands beyond even the Emperor-worship of antiquity that was a rock of offence to all who bow to the Most High. The totalitarian conception is not new, for a forecast of it appeared three centuries ago with the breakdown of the idea of a Christian commonwealth. After the great outburst of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Christendom was long untouched, in most of its area, by any extensive spiritual revival. Thus the field was ready for the sowing of the dragon's teeth. It was in the seventeenth century that they showed above ground. How they have since grown!

During the last two centuries the weakness of the Churches in the English-speaking world has been largely concealed. It was the period of the rise of the great Humanitarian Movement which provided the most effective religion of the age. With that movement Western Christianity was early closely linked, and to it the Churches owe an untold debt. Had it not been for that movement the Churches might well have passed into mere theological cliques, as has happened largely in the East. The new religion that has now arisen, Totalitarianism, contains within itself perversions and inversions of both the Christian and the Humanitarian ideals. But Humanitarianism does not carry with it either sanctions or discipline adequate to maintain it indefinitely, and so the weakness of Christianity has been the opportunity of Totalitarianism. It is idle self-deception to ignore the deplorable failure of Christianity in abdicating before this new religion, which is naught else than a disease of the human spirit.

Many, long before Professor Barth, reached his somewhat delayed conclusion that "National-Socialism, as a religious institution, exhibits all the characteristics of an *anti-Church*, and, as a political experiment, all those of a fundamental dissolution of the just State." Communism —in its Russian form, at least—is the declared foe of all belief in the spirit. This type of totalitarianism may destroy Christians, but can in no wise corrupt Christianity. To Communism Chistians can always answer, with the companions of Daniel, "Our God, whom alone we serve, can deliver us, if He will, from thy hand, thou devourer of men, *but if not*, and if it be not His will, be it known to thee that we will neither serve thy gods nor worship the images that thou has set up." (Daniel,

Ch. 3.) But the other totalitarian monster, National-Socialism, if it has destroyed fewer Christians than Communism, can corrupt Christianity and has profoundly corrupted it.

There has always been a tendency for the Churches to seek the aid and the prestige that the State alone can give. There has now risen a Leviathan-State that, while permitting Christian rites, demands also—not at once, but gradually and with subtly increasing urgency—that men shall worship Leviathan himself. It is an unhappy fact that many who call themselves by the name of Christ, when submitted to this pressure, have bowed down before Leviathan. Tardily, sometimes against their inclination and natural allegiances, all Christians have at last come to realise that their faith has never been faced by so subtle and dangerous a rival.

It was an English thinker who, three hundred years ago, propounded the doctrine of the totalitarian State. This was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), of Malmesbury, whose treatise *Leviathan* was published in 1651. The book has always been highly commended by National-Socialist writers as in close accord with their ideas. So far as the actual theory of government is concerned, they have, in fact, advanced surprisingly little upon it. Given a purely formal Christian shell from which the spiritual element has been emptied, and given the political and social setting of the seventeenth century, the book presents as near a picture of the totalitarian State as could well be imagined. Its remarkable frontispiece is an allegory which covers much of its teaching, and is perhaps by the Czech artist Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-77).

Hobbes early became impressed with the great scientific movement then entering its youthful strength. He had neither training nor capacity for science, and he never understood the nature of the scientific process. Nevertheless, he resolved to become the architect of a complete philosophical structure on a scientific—that is, for him, a materialist—foundation. The work was divided into three parts, dealing successively with Matter, Man and the State. The first two have little interest for us, and his reputation is based upon the third. In building his conception of a Nation-State his elemental material was self-interest, to which term he ultimately reduced all the beliefs, hopes and aspirations of men. The reasoning by which this process is accompished is, in effect, the content of his great book.

In seventeenth century English the word Leviathan was used to indicate some portentous creature or phenomenon, often with a sinister significance, suggesting a personified and mysterious evil, as is in the passage from Isaiah under our title. Thus when Hobbes selected the word he was intentionally provocative, hinting darkly and with designed vagueness at a satanic element.

Hobbes lived in a time of alarms. He was born in the year of the Armada, and he said of his mother that then "she bore twins, myself and fear." Brother Fear seldom left his side, and, despite his fine physique and the brutal boldness of his thought, he was an arrant coward. *Leviathan* is a product of fear, written in years of fear, expounding how fear may be an instrument of statecraft. The greatest fear of Hobbes was that the civilisation of England would break down in anarchy. Nothing approaching this ever happened. There was no general disorder, even during the Civil War, at the very beginning of which, however, Hobbes took ship for France, "the first of all that fled." Moreover, if we consider the Nation-State that he pictured, we shall conclude that the whole history of British polity and British greatness has been a persistent contradiction of his thought. He built his great structure of materials that crumbled. Men's actions cannot be analysed into terms of self-interest nor is their conduct wholly controlled by fear. Among English-speaking people *Leviathan,* an accepted literary masterpiece, has proved politically important almost entirely for the opposition which it has created. Hobbes never had a British follower of any significance.

In the frontispiece of *Leviathan* a hideous crowned giant overawes a fair landscape of hill and dale, sea and river, road and wood, with fortified city, castle, redoubt, barracks and ships. Cathedral and

churches are conspicuous. His body is made up of the figures of multitudes of citizens, whose attitudes of adoration and prostration can be distinguished. The apparition brandishes in his left hand the spiritual crozier, while with his right he menaces with the temporal sword, commanding the souls together with the bodies of men. Above him is written, "Upon earth there is not his like," from the 41st chapter of the Book of Job. This should be re-read, and it will be found that there are many other verses therein more fitting to the Leviathan with which we are to-day faced.

The theory of the State rested necessarily, according to Hobbes, on the general constitution of the physical world and on the nature of man. His conceptions of these are shot with errors, some known to be such by men of science of his day, others only by those in later times. Thus, in a famous passage he portrays the life of natural or "primitive" men as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short," without a society and without laws, each having his hand against the next. That picture is false. All available evidence confirms that man is by nature, and always has been, a social animal, and must, therefore, have some instincts that are not directed to self. "Primitive" men are, in fact, bound by laws more, not less, than civilised men. It is civilised men that have developed individuality and ceased to be a herd. The totalitarian State is a reversion to the herd-State.

It was the aim of Hobbes to develop a conception of sovereignty unlimited by any constriction, and especially by any check by religion. The rise of numerous sects in his day, and the unbalanced behaviour of some of them, seemed to him a very dangerous element in public life and one certain to lead to open and public disorder. The subsequent history of Britain has in no wise supported him.

Hobbes showed great skill in using the formulæ of religion to destroy independent judgment. He was insistent, above all, to extirpate any claim to criticism by advocates of political or religious toleration. The claim of the individual was throughout his especial quarry, for he was forever forecasting anarchy should men assert their power to judge the action of the State by an inner criterion of justice. The private conscience must go. Law was identified with justice, and therefore, in the strict sense, there could be no such thing as an unjust law.

Hobbes regarded as incontrovertible his view of human nature in which conscience is a product of the State—that is, of society—and not the State of conscience. In the State that he envisaged the rulers alone retained their right of private judgment and their original activity over the passive remainder. Thus the Government was made all-powerful and expanded to the dimensions of Leviathan. Decrees issued by the State were the only laws that he recognised as binding men, who, being what they are, yield obedience only to fear. The laws of worship, both public and private, were parts of the laws of the State. Religion becomes an instrument of statecraft, like the army or police. It is a complete polity from which the human soul is excluded.

The subjecting of all departments of human activity to Leviathan is set out in the lower part of the frontispiece. On the left are emblems of a temporal power: castle, crown, cannon, arms and an army in battle. On the right are emblems of spiritual power: church, bishop's mitre, thunderbolts of ecclesiastical denunciation, logical or theological demonstration ("horns of a dilemma," etc.) and council chamber.

★ Copies of the picture at the beginning of this supplement can be obtained from the C.N.-L. office, at a cost of 6d., post free. They are printed on heavy art paper with full, white margins. Early application is advisable.

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